



## **Executive Officer's Statement**

**January 18, 2007**

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### **VCGCB Set to Build on 2006 Accomplishments as It Begins New Year**

The Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board has commenced the New Year with significant developments that include a new Board member, new offices and the continued rollout of a new victim compensation claims management computer system. As we step forward into the New Year, we can also look back on the many highlights and achievements of 2006, including:

- Rosario Marin, upon her appointment in February as Secretary of the California State and Consumer Services Agency, began her leadership role as the Board's new chair.
- When federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding was in jeopardy, Board members worked with the Governor, other public officials, criminal justice professionals and a variety of crime victim advocates to help ensure the availability of VOCA funding, which provides essential support for the VCGCB's victim compensation program and similar programs throughout the country.
- The Board took action to increase the availability of mental health services to victims. It increased session limits, reduced paperwork and increased reimbursement rates, so more licensed mental health professionals will accept and treat victims.
- Crime victims who suffer injuries that require dental treatment now have improved access to care, because the Board established a preauthorization/pre-approval process for the treatment of a victim's crime-related dental injuries.
- The Board raised the compensation cap for funeral and burial expenses to \$7,500 to ensure reimbursement to crime victims reflects changes in costs for these services.
- "CaRES," the VCGCB's new computer system for the Victim Compensation Program, proved itself as an end-to-end system, capable of handling the victim compensation claim process from initial application to final payment.
- The VCGCB developed and implemented its 2006 Strategic Plan, which outlines four key goals – Excellence in Customer Service; Funding Stability; Excellence in Information Technology; and a Positive Workplace Environment.
- The VCGCB's Accounting Division successfully made the transition to new accounting system software, Fundware, which provides a paperless and automated process for paying all bills related to claims processing.
- The VCGCB undertook extensive planning and preparation for its recent relocation.

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The VCGCB is pleased with the progress made last year and looks forward to making continued improvements. A lot is "new" and exciting about this New Year, including the following:

**VCGCB Welcomes New Board Member, State Controller John Chiang**

New Board member State Controller John Chiang comes to the Board with a long history of public service. Most recently, he served as Chairman of the State Board of Equalization (BOE), to which he was first elected in 1998. He represented the BOE on the Franchise Tax Board and as chair of the Streamlined Sales Tax Project's Board of Governors. Chiang represented the BOE's 4th District, which includes the city of Los Angeles and a population exceeding 8.5 million. At the BOE, Chiang sponsored many proposals that were signed into law, and his public service career, with membership on a variety of boards and councils, has brought him many awards. With a degree in finance, a law degree, experience as a tax law specialist with the IRS and as an attorney at the State Controller's Office, Chiang brings valuable expertise to the VCGCB. We look forward to continuing our strong working relationship with the Controller's Office under his leadership.

**Move to the Board's New Home at 400 R Street Completed**

The VCGCB moved to its new 400 R Street offices on January 8. One of the move's most noticeable changes is evident at the Board's meeting today, which is being held in a larger, more accessible public meeting room. This is just one of the many benefits of the relocation that the VCGCB is already beginning to realize. In addition to being a more modern facility, the new offices are located in a safer neighborhood, provide better accessibility, are more cost-effective, and provide a consolidated working space with an environment that promotes teamwork and communication. Thanks to the move, the public will now have more convenient access to the VCGCB, in person and via telephone. Customer service personnel now staff public walk-up windows. The VCGCB has taken advantage of the move to upgrade telecommunications infrastructure. The new telephone system includes sophisticated software to help the VCGCB's Customer Service Center respond to callers more efficiently.

**CaRES (Compensation and Restitution System) Transition Continues**

Last fall, CaRES, the VCGCB's new automated claims processing system for the Victim Compensation Program, proved itself as an end-to-end system, capable of handling the victim compensation process from initial application to final payment. Since then, an increasing number of transactions are being handled with the new system. Applications for compensation are being scanned and data entered into the new system, and VCGCB staff are using CaRES to determine whether applications meet eligibility requirements. The new claims management computer system is increasingly being used to make benefit determinations. Soon to come online will be functions to handle appeals, automated correspondence with customers, bill payments and more.

As the VCGCB completes the conversion to CaRES to ensure it is fully functional, it will be rolled out to our joint-power partners. CaRES is more than a new computer system, it's a new way of doing business that will allow VCGCB to provide victims of violent crime with more efficient, responsive and timely services.

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**VCGCB Updates**

Several laws effective January 1 enhance the availability of compensation available to victims of violent crime in California.

- AB 2413 (Spitzer, Chapter 571, Statutes of 2006), which was sponsored by the VCGCB, creates a pilot program through Dec. 31, 2009, to allow compensation for the loss of childcare services. Victims who were the primary caregivers of children are eligible for reimbursement of childcare costs that are incurred as a result of a qualifying crime. The benefit is paid only when the victim suffers physical injury or death. The cost for all affected children per crime cannot exceed \$5,000, and the period of time covered cannot exceed six months. The new law requires that only licensed caregivers be used. The three-year pilot project will allow the Victim Compensation Program to study the impact, effectiveness and cost of offering the benefit.

AB 2413 also expands availability of compensation for home security and crime scene cleanup expenses. It allows individuals who were living with a homicide victim at the time of the crime to receive reimbursement for home security enhancements. It removes the requirement that the qualifying crime must have occurred in the residence where the security is installed. AB 2413 also allows reimbursement for the cost of crime scene cleanup when any eligible violent crime occurs in a residence. Previously a victim must have died. The maximum benefit limit of \$1,000 for home security and \$1,000 for crime scene cleanup remains unchanged.

- AB 105 (Cohn, Chapter 539, Statutes of 2006) allows the VCGCB's Victim Compensation Program to reimburse more than one relocation per crime, if the relocation is necessary for the personal safety or emotional well being of the victim, as long as the total reimbursement does not exceed the \$2,000 statutory limit. The measure clarifies that only one victim per crime may claim relocation expenses.
- AB 2869 (Leno, Chapter 582, Statutes of 2006) allows an individual who pays the funeral and burial expenses for a victim killed by a crime covered under the Victim Compensation Program to be reimbursed, when the victim was a felon, and the individual receiving reimbursement is not a felon. It also allows an individual who is not a felon to be reimbursed for crime scene cleanup expense in cases where the crime victim was a felon.

In December, the VCGCB welcomed Miles Bristow as its new manager of the Public Affairs and Outreach Unit. He serves as the Board's lead representative to the news media. Bristow has extensive experience with the media and public affairs and for the past six years had served as a Public Information Officer at the Department of Consumer Affairs.